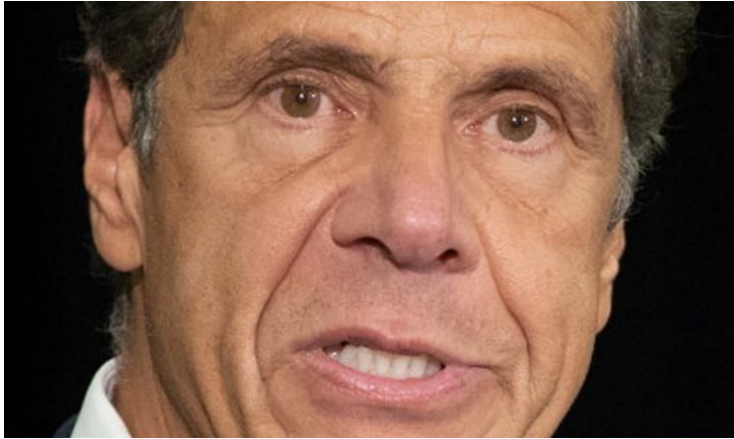


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Cuomo's 'dangerous moment' statement roils the Democratic waters



Former Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo did not say in his Monday statement whether he would run for the office he held for three terms before he was accused of sexual harassment and his spokesman also wouldn't elaborate. Credit: Kendall Rodriguez

By Michael Gormley

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ALBANY — Former Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo further roiled the Democratic waters Monday with a statement to his past campaign supporters that "the state is in a dangerous moment" because of "government incompetence," setting off a barrage of speculation about whether he is thinking about running for the seat from which he resigned in August.

Cuomo didn't say whether he would run for the office he held for three terms before he was accused of sexual harassment and his spokesman, Rich Azzopardi, wouldn't elaborate on Cuomo's statement.

"That was the best threat you ever saw," said Hank Sheinkopf, a veteran Democratic strategist in New York and Washington. "I think what he has in mind is to launch something ... this is an attempt to gauge interest."

But Cuomo's statement also might serve other purposes, political observers said. It can be viewed as continued criticism of Attorney General Letitia James, a potential candidate for governor, whom Cuomo accused of running a flawed, politically motivated investigation. Cuomo also may be pressing his contention that he never committed the sexual harassment of which he was accused. And the reference to extreme policies could be aimed at progressive Democrats, who clamored for Cuomo's resignation.

In his statement, Cuomo said, "I fear the state is in a dangerous moment. We are seeing extremists and political expediency rule the day and 'the tail is wagging the dog' in the Democratic Party. Government incompetence, political slogans and pandering are prevailing ... This is not New York at her finest and we must never settle for less than the people of the state deserve."

He concluded that "New Yorkers have seen effective government that works for them" and the state can't devolve to the incompetence and overspending he said he had inherited in 2011.

Sheinkopf said he believes that Cuomo is making a broader point: "What he's telling people is there has to be a way to end the chaos and the only way to end it is him," Sheinkopf said in an interview with Newsday. "He is setting this up: He's going to be the fixer of the problem ... He is the ultimate showman and he knows his audience."

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Pollster Lee Miringoff said Cuomo's statement is aimed at trying to settle a score against James, whose political stature has risen after her investigation of the sexual harassment allegations.

"He's trying to put his spin on history ... how he was done in by a political witch hunt and that he is interested in counterpunching the person who done him in," Miringoff said.

Now, he said, Cuomo may be preparing to take his criticism a step further.

"He has money, he has name recognition, and to his way of thinking he has a rationale," said Miringoff, a political-science professor and director of the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "That sounds like plans to make plans to me."

State Democratic Party Chairman Jay Jacobs held a news conference Monday to endorse Gov. Kathy Hochul for reelection, but found himself fielding more questions about Cuomo.

"Well, it's a less-than-friendly statement," said Jacobs. "I don't know if I'd like to interpret those statements."

Asked about a Cuomo candidacy, Jacobs said: "I think it would be a very big mistake and I don't think it would be successful."

Hochul said she was focused on governing. "I'm too busy governing New York to worry about emails that are written by people," she said.

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Michael Gormley has worked for Newsday since 2013, covering state government, politics and issues. He has covered Albany since 2001.

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